

Reproduction

The female alpaca- 'hembra'- begins her breeding life at around 12-15 months of age, and is an 'induced' ovulator- the act of mating and the presence of semen stimulates the female to ovulate. Males - 'machos'- are ready to mate from around 2 years of age, and will 'dribble' the semen into the uterus throughout the entire mating, which lasts 15 to 30 minutes. The gestation period of the alpaca is 11-11.5 months, and the offspring are known as 'Criá' until weaning time at around 6 months when they become 'Tuis'. The female is normally re-mated 14-21 days after giving birth, and can reproduce successfully for at least 16 years. Twins are rare occurring about once in 1000 deliveries. Alpacas usually give birth during the day and birthing is generally trouble free and very quick. Crias usually stand and nurse within one hour and are often hard to catch a few hours later!!

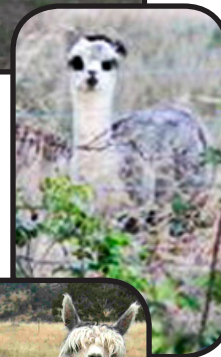


Shelter

Trees and bushes provide the best protection against extremes of heat and cold. Most alpacas will not voluntarily seek shelter in sheds. There is no need for special fencing as alpacas are generally content to stay in their own 'backyards'.

Alpaca Association Membership

The Australian Alpaca Association Ltd. (AAA) represents owners at all levels and is the collective voice of over 2100 members in all States. The Association is the primary resource for breeding and promoting alpacas providing you with the tools, information and support you need to enjoy all the benefits associated with owning alpacas. AAA is the voice for the industry to promote alpaca breeders' interests to governments, associated industries and media in Australia and around the world.



Alpaca Facts



The alpaca is a member of the South American Camelid family, and grazes at an altitude of 3-4000 metres on the Andes Mountains Altiplano, which runs through Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Argentina. In their native land alpacas have been a source of meat, fibre and leather production for thousands of years. An inquisitive, almost mystical animal, they were closely integrated with the Inca culture. The alpaca's lifespan can be over 20 years. Their easy management makes these enchanting and beautiful creatures a dream to farm, and their soft pads are gentle on Australian fragile soils.



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Alpacas were first imported into Australia in the 1850s from Argentina and were farmed in the Goulburn district; however these alpacas were dispersed and eventually died out. The next importation arrived in 1988, the foundation stock coming from Chile and North America. They are now kept in all states of Australia except the Northern Territory. In 1997 the first direct import shipment of alpacas from Peru arrived. In 2007 Australia had over 100,000 alpacas making it the largest national alpaca herd outside South America.

These inquisitive and gentle animals are intelligent and quick to learn, easy to halter train, make wonderful pets and effective guard animals for keeping predators such as foxes at bay. They usually come when called and are sometimes seen walking on leads through shopping centres, travelling in cars through cities or taken into aged care homes for patient therapy.



Types- There are two types of alpaca.

The Huacaya, (pronounced "wahcaya") with its dense fibre that grows perpendicular to the body and has a Merino-type appearance is the most common type.



The Suri has a more lustrous fibre that falls in a dreadlocks fashion down the body and accounts for only 5% of the alpaca population.



Stocking Rate

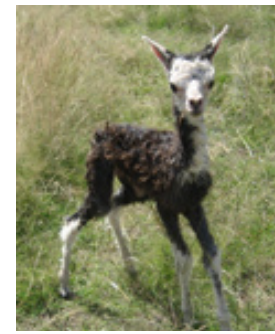
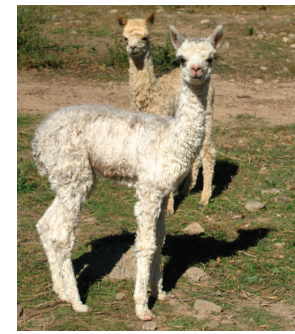
Alpacas are browsers nibbling a range of grasses and hay in the paddock. Some food supplementation is often given to breeding females, although they do very well on a breeding sheep diet. Alpacas are 30% more effective in converting food than sheep, therefore as they are only a little larger than sheep their total feed requirement is roughly equivalent and they can be run at the same number per hectare.

Fibre of the Gods

The fleece of the smaller vicuna wild ancestor of the domesticated alpaca was referred to as the 'Fibre of the Gods' by the Incas, and only royalty were permitted to wear it. Alpaca fibre is unique with its characteristics of fineness and softness combined with strength, light weight, excellent thermal insulation, high durability and soft silky texture. It has a fibre structure that protects it from abrasion and gives it high durability, tensile strength and resistance to pilling and shrinking. It is used to produce a variety of fabrics and garments, ranging from lightweight thermal jackets, luxurious shawls and scarves to gossamer-like wedding gowns. Alpaca fabric drapes elegantly and has an inherent lustre that reflects light, enhancing the amazing range of natural colours from white, cream, apricot, mushroom, fawn, brown, grey and black with endless shades and varieties of all of these. White fibre absorbs dyes exceptionally well and again displays the trademark sheen. Alpaca fibre does not contain lanolin making it hypoallergenic and suitable for allergy sufferers. Internationally, there is an increasing interest in the fibre among fashion houses.



Huacaya fleece is short soft and dense with natural crimp that makes it a naturally elastic yarn, perfect for knitwear or for weaving into cloth for clothing or accessories such as shawls, scarves, stoles and rugs. The rarer suri fleece is long, lustrous, silky and wonderfully luxurious. It is superb for fine lace quality garments accessories and woven goods.



Shearing

The alpaca is shorn once a year, usually around mid to late Spring. The animal is placed on its side and restrained by the legs fore and aft for ease of handling. The first fleece, known as the 'cria fleece', is the most sought after and the finest; however subsequent fleeces are usually denser and yield more fibre - up to about 5-7 kg.

Australian growers have a number of market options with several Australian fleece buyers and processors. Another fleece marketing option is to the cottage craft industry to be hand-spun and knitted or woven into garments.

Husbandry

Alpacas are low maintenance as they do not need crutching, mulesing or tail docking. They have little lanolin in the fleece so do not suffer from fly strike, and because they place their dung in piles where they do not graze, worm infestation is minimal. They don't get footrot but require occasional toenail trimming which can be done at shearing time. They do require vaccination coming into spring and autumn with 6 in 1 vaccine for protection against preventable Clostridial diseases such as pulpy kidney & tetanus. Crias are vaccinated at 6 - 8 weeks of age & then should receive at least two follow up boosters four & 8 weeks later.

Vitamin D plays an important role in controlling calcium and phosphorous utilization in the body, but vitamin D synthesis in the skin is likely to be reduced in winter months, particularly in animals with thick fleeces or dark coloured animals. Crias born in late summer and autumn appear particularly vulnerable to vitamin D deficiency during their first winter and vitamin D injections are recommended.